

# Amnesty International

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## 1. In News

Amnesty International is an organization that works to protect human rights with over 1.8 million members in over 150 countries and territories across the globe. It prides itself on being **non-partial to government, religion and economics**. The mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and **ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination**, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

## History of Amnesty International

- **Peter Benenson**, a British lawyer, founded Amnesty International **in 1961**. Benenson had heard about two Portuguese men who were arrested and in the process of receiving seven-year prison sentences for simply raising their glasses in a toast to freedom. Because of this, he decided to take action on behalf of these prisoners.
- Historically, the main focus of Amnesty International's campaigning has been to free all prisoners of conscience; ensure a prompt and fair trial for all political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel punishments.
- However, over the years, Amnesty International has **expanded their focus to include human rights abuses committed by non governmental bodies and private individuals (non state actors)**.
- It has also targeted abuses in the home or community where **governments have been complicit or have failed to take effective action**.

## Achievements of Amnesty International

- The organization was the winner of the **1977 Nobel Peace Prize** and the **United Nations Human Rights Award in 1978** (Amnesty International USA).
- Amnesty International also helps **educate the general public** on current situations involving human rights. Some of their recent campaigns are called Stop Torture, Control Arms, Stop Violence Against Women, Child Soldiers, International Justice and The Death Penalty.
- In 1961 they had their first mission to Ghana which saw 152 political prisoners released because of their pressure.
- They were given **consultative status by the United Nations in 1964, by Council of Europe in 1965 and UNESCO in 1969.**
- In April 2013, Amnesty celebrated one of the most significant victories in decades. In a UN General Assembly vote, they finally achieved a robust **Arms Trade Treaty** that will help stop the irresponsible arms transfers that cause the deaths of millions and fuel conflict and widespread human rights abuse.
- In 1998, **The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was adopted** following Amnesty International's long standing campaign. This meant that warlords and dictators committing crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes and crime of aggression, could be held to justice.

## Quitting India

- The government has said Amnesty International is under the scanner because it had **violated provisions of the Foreign Exchange Management Act and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA).**
- However Amnesty International maintain the crackdown was an outcome of its **calls for transparency and accountability, most recently for the human rights violations in this year's Delhi riots and in Kashmir.**

- The crackdown, they say, fits into the pattern of a regime seeking to **stifle dissenting voices.**
- The Union government and civil society organizations have long endured an uneasy coexistence. Over the past six years, though, activists say new rules have **increased the compliance burden and allow for bureaucratic overreach.**
- The latest example they cite is from the just-concluded Parliament session, which saw the government amending the FCRA to **ban the transfer of foreign funds from one FCRA-registered NGO to another.**